

Message Text

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PAGE 01 PANAMA 02770 212058Z

21

ACTION ARA-10

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C O N F I D E N T I A L PANAMA 2770

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: SNAR, PN

SUBJECT: LONG TERM LOAN OF PATROL BOATS IN SUPPORT OF INTERNATIONAL
NARCOTICS CONTROL

1. AS A RESULT OF A RECENT MEETING ON CONTROL OF DRUG
TRAFFICKING WHICH I ARRANGED BETWEEN US CONGRESSMEN
LESTER L. WOLFF AND BENJAMIN A. GILMAN AND PANAMANIAN
PRESIDENT DEMETRIO B. LAKAS AND SENIOR LEADERSHIP OF THE
PANAMANIAN MILITARY, THE GUARDIA NACIONAL HAS OFFERED TO
INCREASE THEIR COOPERATIVE PARTICIPATION IN THE INTER-
NATIONAL NARCOTICS CONTROL PROGRAM. THEY PROPOSE CLOSER
SURVEILLANCE AND INTERDICTION OF COASTAL CRAFT, SUSPECTED
OF TRAFFICKING IN ILLEGAL DRUG ACTIVITIES, PASSING THROUGH
THE TERRITORIAL WATERS OF PANAMA.

2. IN ORDER TO ACCOMPLISH THIS ENDEAVOR THE GUARDIA
NACIONAL HAS OFFICIALLY REQUESTED, THROUGH THE US MILITARY
GROUP IN PANAMA:

A. THE LONG TERM LOAN OF SIX (6) 65 FT TO 85 FT DIESEL

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PAGE 02 PANAMA 02770 212058Z

POWERED BOATS UNDER EXISTING FOREIGN ASSISTANCE ACT,
SECTION 503, LEGISLATION FOR THE LOAN OF MILITARY CRAFT.

B. DEVELOPMENT OF A JOINT PLAN FOR EFFECTIVE INTER-DICTION OF SUSPECTED COASTAL PASSAGES.

C. USE OF TIDE FREE CANAL ZONE DOCKAGE AND MAINTENANCE FACILITIES ON THE ATLANTIC AND PACIFIC COASTS.

3. THE EMBASSY VIEWS THIS PROPOSAL AS A MAJOR CONTRIBUTION TO THE INTERNATIONAL NARCOTICS CONTROL EFFORT THAT WOULD ENHANCE COOPERATION BETWEEN THE GUARDIA NACIONAL (GN), THE DEPARTAMENTO NACIONAL DE INVESTIGACIONES (DENI), AND THE DRUG ENFORCEMENT AGENCY (DEA). IF THE PATROL CRAFT ARE MADE AVAILABLE, THE EMBASSY WOULD AMEND ITS NARCOTICS CONTROL ACTION PLAN TO REQUEST CABINET COMMITTEE FOR INTERNATIONAL NARCOTICS CONTROL (CCINC) FUNDS FOR FUEL AND MAINTENANCE OF THE PATROL CRAFT WHICH THE GN HAS INDICATED WOULD ALSO BE NECESSARY. ANY ADDITIONAL FUNDS REQUESTED WOULD ONLY BE USED FOR THE CRAFT WHEN ENGAGED IN NARCOTICS CONTROL OPERATIONS.

4. THE EMBASSY WOULD ALSO RECOMMEND THAT THE CCINC BACK DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE EFFORTS TO OBTAIN SURPLUS MILITARY PATROL CRAFT BY ENLISTING THE SUPPORT OF THOSE MEMBERS OF CONGRESS WHO ARE PARTICULARLY INTERESTED FROM THE NARCOTICS CONTROL ASPECT.

5. IN ADDITION TO THE NARCOTICS CONTROL ASPECT, THE PANAMANIAN PROPOSAL COULD PROVIDE A UNIQUE WAY FOR PANAMA TO BUILD UP AND TRAIN ITS FORCES AND CONTRIBUTE TO THE COMBINED CANAL DEFENSE AS IS CONTEMPLATED BY THE CANAL TREATY WHICH IS BEING NEGOTIATED. THIS PANAMANIAN CONTRIBUTION COULD TAKE PLACE IN A MANNER WHICH IS BOTH POLITICALLY AND MILITARILY ACCEPTABLE TO THE U.S. THROUGH PRECEDENTS ALREADY ESTABLISHED FOR COOPERATION AND USE OF CANAL ZONE FACILITIES BY THE GN NAVAL ELEMENTS.

6. MY MILITARY ADVISOR, COMUSMILGP PANAMA, VIEWS THE GUARDIA NACIONAL'S PROPOSAL AS REASONABLE AND COMPLEMENTARY IF PROPERLY PHASED TO CORRESPOND WITH OUR
CONFIDENTIAL
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PAGE 03 PANAMA 02770 212058Z

EFFORTS TO DEVELOP THEIR NASCENT NAVAL FORCE. A SIMULTANEOUS LOAN OF SIX PATROL CRAFT IS BEYOND THEIR CAPABILITY TO HANDLE AND FAILS TO EXPLOIT THE POTENTIAL WHICH THE SITUATION OFFERS. A TOTALLY DEVELOPED PROGRAM ENVISIONING SIX CRAFT FOR PANAMA IS ABOUT CORRECT BUT PHASING TO ACCOMPLISH IT SHOULD CORRESPOND WITH GN MARINA'S.

A. CAPACITY TO INTEGRATE THE ADDED CRAFT,

B. OBSERVED WILLINGNESS TO USE THE CRAFT EFFECTIVELY AS PROPOSED, AND

C. ANNOUNCED AND AGREED UPON PLANS FOR FUTURE DEVELOPMENT (AS REFLECTED IN PANAMA MSAP FY78-82). THIS TRANSLATES IN CHANGING PURCHASE OF 3 CRAFT IN FY78 TO LOAN OF 2 PATROL CRAFT ASAP TO HELP COUNTER THE DRUG THREAT SOONEST. THEN AFTER APPROXIMATELY A YEAR, LOANING 2 ADDITIONAL CRAFT AND THE FINAL LOAN OF TWO BEING INCORPORATED INTO THE FY 79 TIME FRAME. THERE ARE IN RESERVE OR MOTHBALLED, U.S. MILITARY CRAFT WHICH AT PRESENT CONTRIBUTE VERY LITTLE TO THE U.S. DEFENSE EFFORT, THAT COULD BE USED MORE EFFECTIVELY TO UPGRADE PANAMA'S COASTAL DEFENSES AND AT THE SAME TIME INTERDICT ILLICIT DRUG TRAFFIC DESTINED FOR THE UNITED STATES.

7. BE ADVISED, HOWEVER, THERE ARE MEMBERS OF CONGRESS WHO IN THE PAST REFUSED TO CONSIDER THE LOAN OR SALE OF ANY NAVAL CRAFT TO PANAMA UNDER THE PROVISIONS OF THE BYRD AMENDMENT. IT IS RECOGNIZED THAT GOING BACK TO CONGRESS TO REQUEST THE LOAN OF SMALL BOATS FOR PANAMA MIGHT PROVE DIFFICULT. YET, IN THIS CASE THERE IS A SIGNIFICANT CONTRAVAILING CONGRESSIONAL FORCE AVAILABLE AS WELL AS HIGH LEVEL PRESIDENTIAL INTEREST IN BOTH PANAMA AND THE U.S. WHICH, IN OUR OPINION, MERITS ANOTHER SERIOUS EFFORT. YOUR FULLEST SUPPORT IS URGENTLY SOLICITED IN THAT THIS IS A MATTER WITH FAVORABLE RAMIFICATIONS IN THE FOLLOWING AREAS:

- A. REDUCE DRUG FLOW TO THE CONUS.
 - B. EARLY U.S./ PANAMA COMBINED CANAL ZONE DEFENSE POSSIBILITIES.
 - C. BOLSTER COASTAL SURVEILLANCE IN AREAS AROUND THE CANAL ZONE AT A TIME WHEN PANAMANIAN ARE CONCERNED ABOUT THE POSSIBLE MILITARY THREAT POSED BY CUBA.
 - D. POSSIBLE SIGNIFICANT UNILATERAL U.S. ACTION TO
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PAGE 04 PANAMA 02770 212058Z

SIGNAL DOD SINCERITY TO GN IN SEEKING A TREATY.
E. VISIBLE INDICATOR TO CONGRESS OF PANAMANIAN GOVERNMENT WILLINGNESS TO COOPERATE IN CONTROLLING DRUG TRAFFIC THAT IS CAUSING U.S. PROBLEMS.

8. AWAITING YOUR EARLIEST REPLY.

JORDEN

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